PEACHES AND CREAM - - - - Drawn by James Montgomery Flagg

FAMILIAR INCIDENTS - - - - - - - - By Stephen Leacock

The Dentist and the Gas.

"I THINK," said the dentist, stepping outside again, "I'd better give you gas."

Then he moved aside and hummed an air from a light opera while he mixed up cement.

I sat up in my shroud.

"Gas!" I said.

"Yes," he repeated, "gas, or else ether or a sulphuric anæsthetic, or else beat you into insensibility with a club, or give you 3,000 volts of electricity."

These may not have been his exact words, but they convey the feeling of them very nicely.

I could see the light of primitive criminality shining behind the man's spectacles.

And to think that this was my fault—the result of my own reckless neglect. I had grown so used to sitting back dozing in my shroud in the dentist's chair, listening to the twittering of the birds outside, my eyes closed in the sweet half sleep of perfect security, that the old apprehensiveness and mental agony had practically all gone.

He didn't hurt me, and I knew it.

I had grown—I know it sounds mad—almost to like him.

For a time I had kept up the appearance of being hurt every few minutes just as a precaution. Then even that had ceased and I had dropped into vainglorious apathy.

It was this of course which had infuriated the dentist. He meant to reassert his power. He knew that nothing but gas could rouse me out of my lethargy and he meant to apply it—either gas or some other powerful pain stimulant.

So as soon as he said "gas" my senses were alert in a moment.

"When are you going to do it?" I said in horror.

"Right now, if you like," he answered.

His eyes were glittering with what the Germans call "blutlust." All dentists have it.

I could see that if I took my eye off him for a moment he might spring at me, gas in hand, and throttle me.

"No, not now, I can't stay now," I said, "I have an appointment, a whole lot of appointments, urgent ones, the most urgent I ever had." I was unfastening my shroud as I spoke.

"Well, then, to-morrow," said the dentist.

"No," I said, "to-morrow is Saturday. And Saturday is a day when I simply can't take gas. If I take gas, even the least bit of gas, on a Saturday I find it's misunderstood——"

"Monday then."

"Monday, I'm afraid, won't do. It's a bad day for me—worse than I can explain."

"Tuesday?" said the dentist.

"Not Tuesday," I answered. "Tuesday is the worst day of all. On Tuesday my church society meets, and I must go to it."

I hadn't been near it in reality for three years, but suddenly I felt a longing to attend it.

"On Wednesday," I went on, speaking hurriedly and wildly, "I have another appointment, a swimming club, and on Thursday two appointments, a choral society and a funeral. On Friday I have another funeral. Saturday

I did go. I kept the appointment.

is market day. Sunday is washing day. Monday is drying day——"

"Hold on," said the dentist, speaking very firmly. "You come to-morrow morning. I'll write the engagement for 10 o'clock."

I think it must have been hypnotism.

Before I knew it I had said "Yes."

I went out.

On the street I met a man I knew.

"Have you ever taken gas from a dentist?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he said, "it's nothing."

Soon after I met another man.

"Have you ever taken gas?" I asked.

"Oh, certainly," he answered, "it's nothing, nothing at all."

Altogether I asked about fifty people that day about gas and they all said that it was absolutely nothing. When I said that I was to take it to-morrow they showed no concern whatever. I looked in their faces for traces of anxiety. There weren't any. They all said that it wouldn't hurt me, that it was nothing.

So then I was glad because I knew that gas was nothing.

It began to seem hardly worth while to keep the appointment. Why go all the way downtown for such a mere nothing?

But I did go.

I kept the appointment.

What followed was such an absolute nothing that I shouldn't bother to relate it except for the sake of my friends.

The dentist was there with two assistants. All three had white coats on, as rigid as naval uniforms.

I forgot whether they carried revolvers.

Nothing could exceed their quiet courage. Let me pay them that tribute.

I was laid out in my shroud in a long chair and tied down to it (I think I was tied down; perhaps I was fastened with nails). This part of it was a mere nothing. It simply felt like being tied down by three strong men armed with pincers.

After that a gas tank and a pump were placed beside me and a set of rubber tubes fastened tight over my mouth and nose. Even those who have never taken gas can realize how ridiculously simple this is.

Then they began pumping in gas. The sensation of this part of it I cannot, unfortunately, recall. It happened that just as they began to administer the gas I fell asleep. I don't quite know why.

Perhaps I was overtired. Perhaps it was the simple home charm of the surroundings, the soft drowsy hum of the gas pump, the twittering of the dentists in the trees—did I say the trees? No; of course they weren't in the trees—imagine dentists in the trees—ha! ha! Here, take off this gas pipe from my face till I laugh—really I just want to laugh—only to laugh——

Well, that's what it felt like.

Meanwhile they were operating.

Of course I didn't feel it. All I felt was that some one dealt me a powerful blow in the face with a sledge-hammer. After that somebody took a pickaxe and cracked in my jaw with it. That was all.

It was a mere nothing. I felt at the time that a man who objects to a few taps on the face with a pickaxe is overcritical.

I didn't happen to wake up till they had practically finished. So I really missed the whole thing.

The assistants had gone, and the dentist was mixing up cement and humming airs from light opera just like old times. It made the world seem a bright place.

I went home with no teeth. I only meant them to remove one, but I realized that they had taken them all out. Still, it didn't matter.

Not long after I received my bill. I was astounded at the nerve of it! For administering gas, debtor, so much; for removing teeth, debtor, so much—and so on.

In return I sent in my bill:

DR. WILLIAM JAWS.
Debtor.

To mental agony	$50.00
To gross lies in regard to the nothingness of gas	100.00
To putting me under gas	50.00
To having fun with me under gas	100.00
To Brilliant Ideas, occurred to me under gas and lost	100.00
Grand total	$400.00

My bill has been contested, and is in the hands of a solicitor. The matter will prove, I understand, a test case, and will go to the final courts. If the judges have toothache during the trial, I shall win.

Making a Magazine—The Dream of a Contributor.

I dreamt one night not long ago that I was the editor of a great illustrated magazine. I offer no apology for this; I have often dreamt even worse of myself than that.

In any case I didn't do it on purpose; very often, I admit, I try to dream that I am President Wilson, or Mr. Bryan, or the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, or a share of stock in the Standard Oil Company for the sheer luxury and cheapness of it. But this was an accident.

I had been sitting up late at night writing personal reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln. I was writing against time. The Presidential election was drawing nearer every day and the market for reminiscences of Lincoln was extremely brisk, but of course might collapse any moment. Writers of my class have to consider this sort of thing.

For instance, in the middle of Lent I find that I can do fairly well with "Recent Lights on the Scriptures." Then of course when the hot weather comes the market for Christmas poetry opens and there's a fairly good demand for voyages in the Polar Seas. Later on, in the quiet of the autumn I generally write some "Unpublished Letters from Goethe to Balzac" and that sort of thing.

But it's a wearing occupation, full of disappointments and needing the very keenest business instinct to watch every turn of the market.

I am afraid that this is a digression. I only wanted to explain how a man's mind could be so harassed and overwrought as to make him dream that he was an editor.

I knew at once in my dream where and what I was. As soon as I saw the luxury of the surroundings—the spacious room with its vaulted ceiling, lit with stained glass—the beautiful mahogany table at which I sat writing with a ten dollar fountain pen, the gift of the manufacturers—on embossed stationery, the gift of the embossers—on which I was setting down words at eight and a half cents a word and deliberately picking out short ones through sheer business acuteness—as soon as I saw—this I said to myself:

"I am an editor and this is my editorial sanctum." Not that I have ever seen an editor or a sanctum. But I have sent so many manuscripts to so many editors and received them back with such unfailing promptness that the scene before me was as familiar to my eye as if I had been wide awake.

As I thus mused, revelling in the charm of my surroundings and admiring the luxurious black alpaca coat and the dainty dickie which I wore, there was a knock at the door.

A beautiful creature entered. She evidently belonged to the premises, for she wore no hat and there were white cuffs upon her wrists. She has that indescribable beauty of effectiveness such as is given to hospital nurses.

This, I thought to myself, must be my private secretary.

"I hope I don't interrupt you, sir," said the girl.

"My dear child," I answered, speaking in that fatherly way in which an editor might well address a girl almost young enough to be his wife, "pray do not mention it. Sit down. You must be fatigued after your labors of the morning. Let me ring for a club sandwich."

"I came to say, sir," the secretary went on, "that there's a person downstairs waiting to see you.

My manner changed at once.

"Is he a gentleman or a contributor?" I asked.

"He doesn't look exactly like a gentleman."

"Very good," I said. "He's a contributor for sure. Tell him to wait. Ask the caretaker to lock him in the coal cellar, and kindly slip out and see if there's a policeman on the beat in case I need him."

"Very good, sir," said the secretary.

I waited for about an hour, wrote a few editorials advocating the rights of the people, smoked some Turkish cigarettes, drank a glass of sherry and ate part of an anchovy sandwich.

Then I rang the bell. "Bring that man here," I said.

Presently they brought him in. He was a timid looking man with an embarrassed manner and all the low cunning of an author stamped on his features. I could see a bundle of papers in his hand, and I knew that the scoundrel was carrying a manuscript.

"Now, sir," I said, "speak quickly. What's your business?"

"I've got here a manuscript," he began.

"What!" I shouted at him. "A manuscript! You'd dare, would you! Bringing manuscripts in here! What sort of a place do you think this is?"

"It's a manuscript of a story," he faltered.

"A story!" I shrieked. "What on earth do you think we'd want stories for! Do you think we've nothing better to do than to print your idiotic ravings? Have you any idea, you idiot, of the expense we're put to in setting up our fifty pages of illustrated advertising?

"Look here," I continued, seizing a bundle of proof illustrations that lay in front of me, "do you see this charming picture of an Asbestos Cooker, guaranteed fireless, odorless and purposeless! Do you see this patent motor car with pneumatic cushions and the full page description of its properties? Can you form any idea of the time and thought that we have to spend on these things, and yet you dare to come in here with your miserable stories.

"By heaven!" I said, rising in my seat, "I've a notion to come over there

With all the low cunning of an author stamped on his features.

and choke you. I'm entitled to do it by law, and I think I will."

"Don't! don't!" he pleaded. "I'll go away. I meant no harm. I'll take it with me."

"No you don't," I interrupted; "none of your sharp tricks with this magazine. You've submitted this manuscript to me, and it stays submitted. If I don't like it I shall prosecute you and, I trust, obtain full reparation from the courts."

To tell the truth, it had occurred to me that perhaps I might need after all to buy the miserable stuff. Even while I felt that my indignation at the low knavery of the fellow was justified, I knew that it might be necessary to control it. The present low state of public taste demands a certain amount of this kind of matter distributed among the advertising.

I rang the bell again.

"Please take this man away and shut him up again. Have them keep a good eye on him. He's an author."

"Very good, sir," said the secretary.

I called her back for one moment.

"Don't feed him anything," I said.

"No," said the girl.

The manuscript lay before me on the table. It looked bulky. It bore the title, "Dorothy Dacres; or, Only a Clergyman's Daughter."

I rang the bell again.

"Kindly ask the janitor to step this way."

He came in. I could see from the straight, honest look in his features that he was a man to be relied upon.

"Jones," I said, "can you read?"

"Yes, sir," he said, "some."

"Very good. I want you to take this manuscript and read it. Read it all through and then bring it back here."

The janitor took the manuscript and disappeared. I turned to my desk again and was soon absorbed in arranging a full page display of plumbers' furnishings for the advertising. It had occurred to me that by arranging the picture matter in a neat device with verses from "Home, Sweet Home" running through it in double leaded old English type I could set up a page that would be the delight of all business readers and make this number of the magazine a conspicuous success. My mind was so absorbed that I scarcely noticed that over an hour elapsed before the janitor returned.

"Well, Jones," I said as he entered, "have you read that manuscript?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you find it all right—punctuation good, spelling all correct?"

"Very good indeed, sir."

"And there is, I trust, nothing of what one would call a humorous nature in it? I want you to answer me quite frankly, Jones—there is nothing in it that would raise a smile, or even a laugh, is there?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Jones; "nothing at all."

"And now tell me—for remember that the reputation of our magazine is at stake—does this story make a decided impression on you? Has it," and here I cast my eye casually at the latest announcement of a rival publication, "the kind of tour de force which at once excites you to the full qui vive and which contains a sustained note that palpitates on every

Continued on Twelfth Page.